

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 SINGAP 00790 01 OF 02 220248Z  
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 INR-10 HA-05 /043 W  
-----112095 220349Z /63 R

R 220050Z FEB 78  
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9677  
INFO AMEMBASST KUALA LUMPUR  
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
AMEMBASSY MANILA  
AMCONSUL HONG KONG  
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
AMCONSUL SYDNEY  
USMISSION GENEVA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0790

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: SREF, SN  
SUBJ: SINGAPORE AND VIETNAMESE BOAT REFUGEES

REF: SINGAPORE 0760

1. STRAITS TIMES FEBRUARY 18 CARRIED FULL TEXT OF SINGAPORE  
PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW'S FEBRUARY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE  
AT HILTON HOTEL, SYDNEY, SHORTLY BEFORE HIS RETURN HOME  
FROM ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE. AMONG  
NUMBER OF TOPICS TOUCHED UPON WAS QUESTION OF VIETNAMESE  
BOAT REFUGEES AND CONDITIONAL SINGAPORE OFFER TO ESTABLISH  
TRANSIT CAMP FOR THEM. (WE BELIEVE THIS IS FIRST TIME  
GOS HAS PUBLICLY MENTIONED OFFER.) TEXT OF THAT PORTION  
OF PRESS CONFERENCE DEALING WITH REFUGEES FOLLOWS:

2. QUOTE. Q. HAS THERE BEEN REFERENCE TO THE  
QUESTION OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM DURING THESE TALKS  
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OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS? LEE: IT DIDN'T APPEAR IN  
THE COMMUNIQUE, IF I REMEMBER. Q. I AM JUST WONDER-  
ING IF THE QUESTION WAS DISCUSSED? LEE: AS I SAID,  
WE COME HERE AS GUESTS AND ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS  
AN ASIAN HAS AT THE BACK OF HIS MIND IS, WHEN HE IS  
THE GUEST HE IS NEVER TO BE A CAUSE FOR EMBARRASSMENT.  
I MUST SAY, HOWEVER, THAT I DID MENTION TO MR. FRASER

AND MR. PEACOCK THAT WE READ WITH INTEREST WHAT WAS SAID IN DARWIN AT THE TIME OF THE ELECTIONS WHEN THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WERE ARRIVING, AND I PERSONALLY CONGRATULATED BOTH OF THEM IN KEEPING THEIR COOL, AND MODERATING SOME RATHER EXTRAVAGANT STATEMENTS BEING MADE BY MR. NIXON (PETER NIXON, THE AUSTRALIAN TRANSPORT MINISTER), WAS IT? I THOUGHT AT THAT TIME THAT THERE WAS SOME RATHER PERJORATIVE SIMILARITY IN THE NAMES BUT HE LACKED SOMETHING. Q. MR. PRIME MINISTER, HAS SINGAPORE BEEN ACTIVELY IF NOT ENCOURAGING CERTAINLY NOT HINDERING, THE PROGRESS OF THE REFUGEES GOING DOWN TOWARDS AUSTRALIA IN PROVISIONING AND THINGS? LEE: WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE A 25-FOOT KETCH AND I'LL PROVIDE YOU WITH NECTAR AND HONEY TO TRY AND MAKE THIS HAZARDOUS VOYAGE FROM SINGAPORE TO DARWIN? Q. PRIME MINISTER, DO YOU FEEL THAT THIS ISSUE, WHICH YOU FEEL DEEPLY ABOUT, COULD BE RAISED OR SHOULD BE RAISED IN A MORE REGIONAL FORUM SOON? LEE: I THINK THIS IS A WORLD ISSUE. IT IS NOT AN ISSUE CONNECTED WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA OR THE INDIAN OCEAN, PACIFIC OCEAN COUNTRIES. PRESIDENT CARTER HAS MADE HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN NEEDS AND THE QUALITY OF ALL MANKIND A MAJOR ASSUMPTION OF HIS POLITICAL BELIEFS AND POLITICAL POLICIES, AND I THINK WE OUGHT TO TAKE HIM SERIOUSLY AND SPELL OUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THOSE MAJOR ASSUMPTIONS IN ITS APPLICATION TO THIS ONE VERY CRUEL OUTCOME OF A CONFLICT THAT WENT ON FOR MANY YEARS AND HAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOT RESOLVED ITSELF. BY THE TIME YOU HAVE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WILLING TO RISK WORSE THAN DEATH FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES INTO THE WATERY UNKNOWN, THEN IF WE ARE CIVILIZED HUMAN BEINGS LIVING UP TO OUR BELIEFS, WE OUGHT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT AND NOT JUST SAY THIS IS A MATTER FOR THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA, PERHAPS, AUSTRALIA FEELING EITHER GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY OR OTHER MORAL OBLIGATIONS, SHOULD TALK ABOUT IT. I THINK SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE AND IT HAS GOT TO BE DONE BY THE WORLD COMMUNITY...OR AGAIN, WE ARE EMBARKED ON AN EXERCISE THAT IS JUST SANCTIMONIOUS HUMBUG...ONE STANDARD, WHEN I TALK ABOUT REFUGEES AND WHAT SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES ARE DOING FOR THEM, AND ANOTHER STANDARD WHEN I TALK ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE QUALITY OF HUMAN BEINGS IN RELATION TO SOUTHERN AFRICA, THEN YOU SAY -- WELL, THAT IS A LONG WAY OFF. BUT THEY ARE THE SAME PROBLEM AND WE HAVE GOT TO FACE UP TO THEM.

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0790

(NEXT TWO QUESTIONS DEALTH WITH VIETNAM-CAMBODIA CONFLICT  
AND QUESTION OF TERRORISM. THEY THEN RETURNED TO DISCUSSION OF  
REFUGEES AS FOLLOWS)

Q. ON THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES, WHY IS IT THAT  
SINGAPORE TURNS AWAY SO MANY REFUGEE BOATS INSTEAD  
OF PERMITTING THEM TO LAND SO THAT THEY CAN BE PROCESSED  
FOR SETTLEMENT BY WESTERN COUNTRIES ELSEWHERE? LEE: WE  
HAVE TOLD THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES AND  
WE HAVE TOLD SEVERAL OF THE GOVERNMENTS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED  
AN INTEREST IN THE FATE OF THESE REFUGEES, THAT SINGAPORE  
IS QUITE HAPPY TO HAVE ONE OF ITS OFF-SHORE ISLANDS OR  
ISLETS SET ASIDE FOR THE TRANSIT OF THESE REFUGEES,  
PROVIDED WE DO NOT HAVE A REPEAT OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THE  
SECOND HALF OF 1975 WHEN WE HAD THOUSANDS OF THESE  
PEOPLE COME IN AND THEN THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR  
REFUGEES GOES AROUND HAWKING THEM: BODIES FOR SALE OR  
SETTLEMENT. NOTHING IS MORE DEGRADING THAN TO WATCH  
THAT HAPPEN. ONCE THEY ARE NICELY SITED OR REASONABLY  
SITED IN RELATIVELY SANITARY CONDITIONS, AND THE WORLD  
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SALVES ITS CONSCIENCE BY JUST DONATING TO THE U.N. HIGH  
COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES FUND TO FEED THEM, IT MIGHT  
GO ON LIKE THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES FOR 30 YEARS AFTER THE  
EVENT. IN OTHER WORDS, I SAY COUNTRY "X" NEED NOT TELL

ME HOW MANY -- NEED NOT TELL THE WORLD -- HOW MANY REFUGEES  
IT IS PREPARED TO TAKE, IT HAS JUST GOT TO TELL THE U.N.  
REFUGEE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND WHISPER IT TO ME... I'D  
LIKE THEM TO BE ABLE TO LAND IN SINGAPORE, ADJUST AND  
ADAPT AND SETTLE IN THEIR PERMANENT HOMES WITHIN LESS THAN  
NINE MONTHS OR NOT MORE THAN A YEAR. I WOULDN'T LIKE  
TO HAVE THEM FESTERING AWAY LIKE THEY HAVE DONE IN OTHER  
REFUGEE CAMPS.

Q. I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU IF YOU COULD EXPLAIN PERHAPS  
A BIT MORE FULLY THE SINGAPORE POSITION ON THIS, BECAUSE  
YOU MAY APPEAR TO BE SAYING THAT BECAUSE THE WORLD ISN'T  
SHARING IN THE PROBLEM, SINGAPORE WON'T TAKE A PART IN  
THE PROBLEM. LEE: SINGAPORE HAS TAKEN PART IN THE PROBLEM.  
WE'VE PROVIDED...

Q. SINCE 1975 YOU HAVE BEEN TAILING OFF  
YOUR EFFORTS. LEE: WE HAVE PROCESSED SEVERAL THOUSAND  
REFUGEES. WE PROVIDED THEM WITH FOOD, WITH SHELTER. WE WERE  
REIMBURSED FOR IT BY THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER WHILST  
HE HAWKED AROUND FOR GOVERNMENTS WILLING TO TAKE THESE  
BODIES. AND I AM SAYING IF YOU FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT IT,  
YOU SHOULD PESTER THOSE GOVERNMENTS WITH A CAPACITY TO  
ABSORB THESE REFUGEES AND JUST WHISPER TO ME HOW MANY  
YOU CAN TAKE AND I WILL LET THEM INTO TRANSIT CAMPS IN AN  
OFF-SHORE ISLAND. AND IF YOU DON'T DO THAT, AND PERSIST  
IN YOUR QUESTIONING, THEN I MUST REGRETFULLY INCLUDE YOUR  
IDEALISTIC MOTIVES AMONGST THE SAME BRACKET OF EITHER IGNORANCE  
OR YOU-KNOW-WHAT.

Q. HOW DO YOU REACT TO AUSTRALIAN CONCERN THAT THERE  
HAVE BEEN STREAMS OF REFUGEES COMING DOWN TO THE NORTHERN  
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COAST OF THIS COUNTRY, APPARENTLY HAPHAZARDLY AND  
WE ARE CONCERNED THAT WE CAN'T ORGANIZE THESE FLEETS?  
LEE: WHY NOT MOUNT A CAMPAIGN IF YOU REALLY FEEL FOR  
THEM AND SAY LOOK, NOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF SINGAPORE  
HAS SAID THAT THEY WILL TAKE TEMPORARILY X NUMBER, OR  
ANY NUMBER WE MENTIONED, THAT WE WILL TAKE PERMANENTLY, WHY  
NOT INFORM THEM QUICKLY SO THAT SOMETHING CAN BE DONE  
IMMEDIATELY? WHY PESTER ME? YOU KNOW MY PUBLIC POSITION.  
Q. DO YOU THINK WE'RE DOING ENOUGH? LEE: THAT IS NOT...  
YOU KNOW THE AUSTRALIANS SUFFER FROM A TERRIBLE GUILT  
COMPLEX.

3. COMMENT: AS NOTED ABOVE, THIS APPEARS TO BE FIRST  
TIME ANY GOS LEADER HAS PUBLICLY MENTIONED SINGAPORE'S  
OFFER OF TRANSIT CAMP FOR REFUGEES. IN GENERAL, LEE'S  
COMMENTS REFLECT WHAT HE AND OTHER SINGAPORE OFFICIALS  
HAVE BEEN SAYING PRIVATELY WITH REGARD TO REFUGEES AND  
TRANSIT CAMP OFFER. PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT THAT  
REFUGEES WOULD BE GIVEN FROM NINE MONTHS TO ONE YEAR

FOR RESETTLEMENT AFTER THEIR ADMISSION TO PROPOSED CAMP  
SEEMS TO BE FURTHER REFINEMENT OF CONDITIONS HE HAS  
ATTACHED TO ESTABLISHMENT OF CAMP. WHILE TELECAST OF  
INTERVIEW ON LOCAL TELEVISION SHOWS PARTICIPANTS IN  
GENERALLY GOOD HUMOR AND ENGAGING IN OCCASIONAL BANTER,  
LEE'S COMMENTS INDICATE CONTINUING SENSITIVITY TO OUT-  
SIDE CRITICISM ON REFUGEE QUESTION.  
HOLDRIDGE

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 22 feb 1978  
**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** SINGAPORE AND VIETNAMESE BOAT REFUGEES  
**TAGS:** SREF, SN  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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